

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Previously Presented) A method for data management for an analytical laboratory, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a plurality of containers for the laboratory analysis of biological specimens, each container being associated with a unique identification code of said container and having a marking including said unique identification code applied to said container during production or packaging of said container;

associating a patient code with a patient to be subjected to analysis;

for each container used for said patient, generating in a data processing system a combination of said patient code and said unique identification code of the corresponding container;

carrying out, by means of at least one analyzer, at least one analysis on the container or containers used for said patient, the analyzer entering the results of said analysis, combined with the unique identification code of the container or containers, into the data processing system.

2. (Previously Presented) The method according to Claim 1, comprising the steps of: generating a patient code for at least one patient on whom at least one analysis is to be carried out and storing said patient code in a data processing system;

placing a biological specimen from said patient in said at least one container;

carrying out at least one analysis of said specimen in at least one analyzer, the analyzer

reading the unique identification code of said container and entering into said data processing system the results of the analysis combined with the unique identification code of said container;

10 using said data processing system to associate the results of the analysis or analyses with the patient code, and then with the patient identified by said patient code, by means of the combination of the patient code with the unique identification code.

3. (Previously Presented) The method according to Claim 1, in which said unique identification code is placed on the corresponding container in a machine readable format.

4. (Canceled)

5. (Previously Presented) The method according to Claim 1, in which said patient code is placed on a medium in a machine-readable format.

6. (Previously Presented) The method according to Claim 3, in which the combination of the patient code with the unique identification code is generated by the sequential reading by an automatic reading instrument of the patient code and the unique identification code, or vice versa.

7. (Previously Presented) The method according to Claim 1, in which said patient code

and said unique identification code are reproduced as bar codes and are optically read to produce said combination.

8. (Previously Presented) The method according to Claim 1, in which said patient code is generated by a central computer of said data processing system; the combination of the patient code with the unique identification code is carried out by means of a unit of said data processing system other than said central computer; and the result of the analysis, associated with the patient code, is sent to said central computer.

9. (Previously Presented) The method according to Claim 1, in which said patient code is generated by a central computer of said data processing system; the combination of the patient code with the unique identification code is carried out by means of a unit of said data processing system other than said central computer; and the result of the analysis, associated with the unique identification code of the containers, is sent to said central computer, the central computer being programmed to associate with the result of the analysis the data relating to the patient to whom said result relates.

10. (Previously Presented) A data processing system for data management in an analytical laboratory, the system comprising, in combination,

a central electronic computer, for acquiring the data on patients on whose biological specimens the analyses are to be carried out, and for generating a patient code for each patient

5 acquired;

means for acquiring a unique identification code associated with each container of a plurality of containers for laboratory analysis of biological specimens;

a marking with said unique identification code, said marking being applied to said container during production or packaging of the container;

10 means for combining each of said acquired unique identification codes with a corresponding patient code to form combined data based on said unique identification code and said patient code;

15 at least one analyzer with means for reading the unique identification codes associated with the containers which are placed in it, said analyzer carrying out at least one analysis on a biological specimen contained in the containers placed in it and supplying to said electronic computer the result of the analyses carried out, combined with data capable of associating said result with the patient to whom the biological specimen belongs based on said combined data.

11. (Previously Presented) The system according to Claim 10, comprising means for receiving from said at least one analyzer the result of said at least one analysis combined with the unique identification code of the container in which the analyzed biological specimen is placed, said means being programmed to associate said result with the patient code relating to the unique identification code combined with the result of the analysis, to send the result of the analysis combined with the patient code to said central electronic computer.

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10 12. (Previously Presented) The system according to Claim 10, in which the result of the analysis, combined with the unique identification code of the corresponding container, is sent to said central computer, the central computer being programmed to associate, by means of the combination of the patient code with the unique identification code, each unique identification code - and consequently the result of the analysis - with the patient code of the patient whose biological specimen is contained in the container identified by said unique identification code.

13 - 20 (Canceled)

21. (Previously Presented) The method according to Claim 1, further comprising:
connecting a means to each container for determining an expiry date of the respective container.

22. (Previously Presented) The system according to Claim 10, further comprising:
means connected with each container for determining an expiry date of the respective container.

23. (Currently Amended) An analytical laboratory data management method comprising the steps of:
generating unique identification codes;

providing a plurality of containers for the laboratory analysis of biological specimens;
5 associating each of said containers with one of said unique identification codes and
applying a marking including said unique identification code to the associated container
during production or packaging of the container at a first location;

generating patient codes with a host computer or providing as input into the host
computer the generated patient codes;

10 associating each patient code with an individual patient to be subjected to analysis;
providing, at a second location, a biological specimen from the individual patient with
the associated patient code in the container with said marking including said unique
identification code;

providing correlation data, based on a combination of said patient code and the marked
15 said unique identification code of the corresponding container for which the biological
specimen has been or will be provided, by reading or receiving said patient code and reading
the marked said unique identification code of the corresponding container having the biological
specimen, said correlation data being provided to a device separate from said host computer;

providing an analyzer for analysis of the biological specimen;

20 carrying out at least one analysis on the container, with the unique identification code
having the biological specimen, using the analyzer to provide results of the analysis associated
with the unique identification code;

associating the results of the analysis with the patient code at the device separate from
the host computer based on the correlation data; and

25 sending the results of the analysis and associated patient code to the host computer.

24. (Previously Presented) The method according to Claim 23, further comprising:
connecting a means to each container for determining an expiry date of the respective
container.

25. (Currently Amended) An analytical laboratory data management method
comprising the steps of:

generating unique identification codes;

providing a plurality of containers for the laboratory analysis of biological specimens;

5 associating each of said containers with one of said unique identification codes and
applying a marking, including said unique identification code, to the associated container
during production or packaging of the container at a first location;

generating patient codes with a host computer or providing as input into the host
computer the generated patient codes;

10 associating each patient code with an individual patient to be subjected to analysis;

providing, at a second location, a biological specimen from the individual patient with
the associated patient code in the container with said marking including said unique
identification code;

15 providing correlation data based on a combination of said patient code and the marked
said unique identification code of the corresponding container for which the biological

specimen has been or will be provided, by reading or receiving said patient code and reading the marked said unique identification code of the corresponding container having the biological specimen;

providing an analyzer for analysis of the biological specimen;

20 carrying out at least one analysis on the container, with the unique identification code having the biological specimen, using the analyzer to provide results of the analysis associated with the unique identification code;

sending the results of the analysis associated with the unique identification code to the host computer; and

25 associating the results of the analysis with the patient code at the host computer based on the correlation data.

26. (Previously Presented) The method according to Claim 25, further comprising:
connecting a means to each container for determining an expiry date of the respective container.

27. (Previously Presented) A set of containers for laboratory analysis of biological specimens, each container of the set comprising:

a container body;

5 a marking or label connected to said container body and having or embodying a machine-readable identification code that is unique to said container body relative to other

identification codes of the set of containers, said marking or label with said machine-readable identification code being associated with said container body and applied to said container body during production or packaging of said container body; and

10 means connected with said container body during production or packaging of said container body for determining an expiry date.

28. (Previously Presented) The container according to Claim 27, wherein said identification code is a bar code.